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Dealing with Student Misbehaviour both Verbally and Physically: A Comparison of Perceptions of Readiness to Address Classroom Management Issues

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Abstract

Perceptions of professional gains in relation to the new teacher's ability to address volatile verbal and physical incidents with students were examined. Students who are studying education through a consecutive program feel that they have acquired significantly more professional background about behavioural interventions than students acquiring a comparable degree through a concurrent route. Participants felt significantly more comfortable intervening in behaviour situations when they perceived verbal intervention was needed than they felt when they determined that physical intervention was needed. Also, those who felt most confident with verbal interventions were more confident with intervening physically.

Keywords: Behaviour; classroom management; teacher interventions in misbehaviour; consecutive education programs; concurrent education programs.

Introduction

This paper reports on a study regarding whether or not pre-service teacher candidates feel knowledgeable and confident in the acquisition of skills they need to teach in their own classrooms by the end of their respective teacher preparation programs. The study contrasted responses from teacher candidates who completed their teacher preparation programs in different models. One group graduated through an eight month program, involving 13 weeks of classroom practicum time; the second group graduated with a five year concurrent education degree, including 19 weeks of classroom practicum. The focus of this study is on teacher candidates' perceptions of how prepared they feel to intervene in behavioural situations with students that involve either verbal or physical intervention. We investigated how effective in some behaviour management tasks new teachers perceive themselves to be as a direct result of what they have learned through their respective programs.

Background

Teacher preparation programs include a combination of course work in a university setting, and internship-style practicum placements in classroom settings. In the jurisdiction where this study was completed, the teacher candidates engage in the study of classroom management in two different models. In the consecutive program, the teacher candidates participate in a 12 hour separate mini-course about classroom management and may have opportunities in other courses to discuss management issues as they relate to specific contexts within another area of study (e.g., classroom management with special needs students; classroom management in a gym context, etc.). However, those students who acquire their B.Ed. certification through concurrent education routes have the classroom management portion of their program embedded in a curriculum methods core course, which may dedicate fewer hours to this important topic. Also, in the concurrent education program, the topic is addressed with specifically dedicated time in a course, during year 2 of the 5 year program. As this university offers two routes to the completion of the

same bachelor of education (B.Ed.) degree, we identified the need to compare teacher candidates' perceptions of the relative value of these differences in providing them with the skills and strategies needed to support their developing professional skills to prepare them to be successful with the role of teacher. The skills that were identified for this aspect of the larger study were selected because, while some theory for each skill can be provided in the context of their courses, each skill could reasonably be expected to develop more fully if teacher candidates had contextualized opportunities in schools to use these skills and to consider the impact of their practices in relation to the outcomes they achieved. Skills were identified by researchers in this category of professional practice, allowing us to examine relative perceptions of the two groups of teacher candidates regarding their readiness to address classroom situations requiring verbal or physical intervention.

Literature Review

Disruptive behaviours in the classroom include any student activity that "causes stress for teachers, interrupts the learning process and that leads teachers to make continual comments to students" (Stewart, Bend, McBride-Chang, Fielding, Deeds, & Westrick, 1998, p. 60). To address such disruptions in learning, researchers have generally taken a scientific approach to try to: 1) identify the steps involved in the escalation of disruption in the classroom; 2) measure types and incidences of behaviour problems in the classroom; and 3) identify steps that teachers can use to address the behaviour problems they encounter.

Teachers may be taught that if they can successfully identify the steps involved in the escalation of a classroom disruption, the disruption may be either avoided or lessened and learning may be resumed. For example, Myers (accessed online July 14, 2014), identifies seven stages in the escalation cycle of a student's disruptive classroom behaviour. This cycle explains the steps that a student goes through as they misbehave, suggesting that an alert teacher ought to be able to intervene at any stage of the escalation to defuse the developing situation. Myer's escalation stages include: 1) Calm: There is a period of calm, where nothing is wrong; 2) Trigger: Something happens that sets the student off or causes the student to behave in a negative way; 3) Agitation: This is when something is added to the first trigger. This can either be the way the teacher or other witnesses react or any other action that could cause the student's behaviour to worsen; 4) Acceleration: The student's actions/behaviours start to get worse and more out of hand; 5) Peak: The behavior is at its worst; 6) Deceleration: The student begins to return to a calm state. The situation is addressed and something is done to handle it; 7) Recovery: This is whatever occurs to try and repair the behaviour that happened during the acceleration and peak of the negative behavior. Myers includes a 12-step process for handling negative behaviours in the classroom.

Many researchers have developed scales for measuring problem behaviours in the classroom. In separate studies, Wheldall and Merrett (1988) identified the types of classroom behaviours that primary teachers find most disruptive to their teaching. They found that teachers identified the following behaviours as disruptive: eating, nonverbal noise, disobedience, talking out of turn, idleness/slowness, unpunctuality, hindering others, physical aggression, untidiness, and being out of their assigned seat. In the second study, Houghton, Wheldall, and Merrett (1988) identified classroom behaviours which secondary school teachers identified as disruptive. In this study, teachers identified similar behaviours as disruptive but secondary teachers were less concerned about eating in the classroom and identified verbal abuse as an additional behavioural concern that characterized older students' misbehaviours. Similarly, the work of Reed and Kirkpatrick (1998) identified the most common misbehaviours in classrooms by interviewing 12 junior secondary teachers. These teachers identified 17 common student behavior problems. Among these behavior concerns, the most commonly experienced were talking out of turn, non-attentiveness, daydreaming, and idleness. These interviews also provided teachers' perceptions about the most unacceptable behaviours they experienced in their classrooms, including disobedience, rudeness, talking out of turn, and verbal aggression. Reed and Kirkpatrick concluded that the troubling behaviours may not necessarily involve the student breaking rules but could involve infractions that violated the implicit norms (p.7) of the social situations involved in a learning environment. For the purposes of the current study, the Reed and Kirkpatrick study is particularly relevant because it also identified categories of student behaviours that were most likely to require teacher intervention. These behaviours were perceived to be behaviours that involved rule breaking, violations of the implicit norms or expectations, being inappropriate in the classroom, and upsetting the productivity of the teaching and learning interactions. The teachers in this study reported that they found behaviours that disrupt teaching, affect student learning adversely, or that indicated that the offending student lacked the values and attitudes that the teachers considered proper in the context, were the most intolerable to them (p. 6).

In the same study, participants reported that they found verbal aggression to be particularly problematic if it was both disruptive and hostile as this could lead to physical aggression. This work also reported, as a limitation, that there is a need to study specific, effective classroom management strategies that deal with identified problem behaviours in the classroom context.

To this end, several researchers and theorists have proposed models for addressing classroom discipline. All of these models focus on the ultimate outcome of producing positive behavior as a road to learning and motivation in the classroom. These researchers/theorists include Fred Jones (willing engagement in learning), Marvin Marshall (fostering responsible behavior), William Glasser (the power of positive choices), Spencer Kagan (working with students), and Paula Cook (helping students who exhibit neurological-based behaviours). In the following paragraphs, a brief overview of the key ideas proposed by each of these researchers is summarized.

The processes for managing discipline that are proposed by Fred Jones (*Positive Classroom Discipline*, 1987) are fundamentally reflective of effective teaching. Jones believes that discipline needs are minimized when students are actively and purposefully engaged in learning and are able to follow directions, because of the visual supports that are provided as they work (e.g., graphic organizers). By chunking learning into brief teacher input followed by student output cycles, Jones believes that students will meet academic success and thereby eliminate problem behaviours that accrue as a result of frustration. To engage in this type of teaching, Jones offers six principal teaching tactics. These include: 1) use say, see and do teaching; 2) work the crowd by interacting with students as they learn; 3) use body language effectively as you teach (i.e., body carriage, calm and proper breathing, eye contact, physical proximity, facial expressions); 4) provide help efficiently; 5) use visual instructional plans to help students understand what is expected of them as they work on academic tasks; and 6) use preferred activity time (PAT) to motivate students to complete required tasks. This system is supported by a backup system to address inevitable misbehaviours, with three levels of response (small, medium, large) that reflect the level of infraction and its frequency as a disruptor in the classroom. Jones' management system is commonly used in classrooms but may not be articulated in the terms he uses to explain his six principal tactics. What is clear in this system, however, is the strong links that are assumed to exist between good teaching and good classroom management.

In the book *Discipline without Stress, Punishment, or Rewards: How Teachers and Caregivers Promote Responsibility and Learning* (2012), retired educator Marvin Marshall stresses the need to build a sense of personal responsibility in students. To do this, he recommends four key steps to work with students to 1) teach and practice procedures; 2) infuse communication with positive messages; 3) empower students by giving them choices; and 4) ask reflective questions to influence students' thinking. Marshall proposes that the consistent use of these steps will support students as they analyze, reflect on, and adopt personal behaviours that correlate with school success. This book promotes the idea of creating responsibility rather than focusing on obedience. By clarifying expectations and helping students understand the reasons for responsible behaviour, educators can create internal motivation for students to behave and be productive. Once again, a model for discipline in the classroom makes the connection between positive behaviours and effective learning.

Psychiatrist William Glasser is well regarded for his work with visioning quality schools. Building on reality therapy concepts, Glasser promotes the idea of teaching students to choose positive behaviours rather than using coercion to have them comply with the direction of someone in authority. This concept is often referred to as *choice theory* and was presented first in 1996 and later revisited in the book *Every Student Can Succeed* (2001). In this book, Glasser connects the motivation to learn with the key ingredients of interesting material and accessible activities to support learning the information provided to them. Like other authors in the area of discipline, Glasser presents his model as a sequence of guiding steps, including: 1) provide an engaging curriculum; 2) promote good teaching to ensure effective learning; and 3) influence students to make positive social and academic choices. In Glasser's philosophy, he promotes looking at discipline approaches by examining resolutions to situations and avoiding punishment when possible when maintaining a positive tone in the classroom. Glasser connects the concepts of discipline and teaching by suggesting that effective classrooms will provide a warm, supportive classroom climate rather than bossing or using coercion, provide useful real-life work, promote high standards in student work, provide opportunities for self-evaluation and improvement, and help students recognize the feelings connected with academic success that is ethically achieved.

Spencer Kagan, who is noted for his work on cooperative learning strategies and cooperative structures, has applied his psychology background to developing ideas for creating positive classroom learning. He

believes that students should receive help and support to achieve, rather than submitting to external discipline something that is done to a student to discipline him/her. Kagan (2007/2007) identified 4 categories of disruptive behaviours including: aggression, breaking rules, confrontation, and disengagement. These categories are reflective of disruptive behaviours identified by Wheldall and Merrett (1988) and Houghton, Wheldall, and Merrett (1988). Kagan is probably best known for the instructional structures that are used to create a cooperative classroom climate that recognizes the value of preventative approaches to discipline. However, he also recognizes the need to administer consequences to control instances of disruptive behaviour, using a sequence of steps that range from a verbal warning, to reflection time, a personal improvement plan, and parental and administrative involvement. This sequence is based on the progressive discipline concept of minimally necessary intervention.

Teacher Paula Cook specializes in teaching students with neurological-based behaviours that may cause classroom disruptions (2000/2004/ 2008). Such difficulties may manifest as unruly behaviour, language, or generalized academic challenges and may include specific diagnoses such as sensory integration dysfunction (SID), bipolar disorder, autism spectrum disorder, oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), and traumatic and non-traumatic brain injuries. Rage may be an indicator behaviour associated with one or more of these diagnoses. To address behaviours resulting from any of these conditions, Cook has developed a model for classroom management which reflects some of the stages of escalation as identified by Myers and is subsequently supported by the work of herself and other researchers (Cook, 2008; Echternach & Cook, 2004; Greene, 2001; Hill, 2005; Packer, 2005). Her model is based on the principles of support to help students feel secure, thereby providing the conditions necessary for students to access the best possible learning. In this model, supports are specific to individual needs and focus on developing self-control skills so that every student can participate in group activities, without distractions. Cooke stresses the need to celebrate each student's progress toward this end and the need for teachers to persevere in the support they give.

When selecting from among the proliferation of models for addressing classroom discipline, including both verbal and physical aggression, whether either is unique in circumstances or attributable to a specific neurological disorder, educators can reflect on their choices using the 8 fundamental planning questions suggested by Charles (2008). These questions include both philosophical ideas about personal expectations and professional practice-related questions that focus on attitudes and tactics for management. The questions (p. 249) include:

1. How can I expect my students to behave; what is misbehavior?
2. How does misbehavior damage teaching and learning?
3. What is the purpose and nature of classroom discipline?
4. What does discipline require of me legally, professionally, and ethically?
5. What attitude serves me best in ensuring good discipline?
6. How can I proactively prevent or reduce student misbehavior?
7. How can I best provide ongoing support for proper student behaviour?
8. How can I best redirect misbehavior humanely and effectively?

It is evident from this list of questions that the focus remains on the key purpose of ensuring good classroom management, to produce a classroom climate that focuses on learning for all students. With this concept in mind, we sought to examine the self-reported knowledge and confidence of two groups of teacher candidates who acquired backgrounds about theory and practice in this critically important professional skill in two different formats in their respective teacher preparation programs.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were from both the consecutive and the concurrent programs at three campuses from one Northern Ontario university. A total of 212 respondents (25 males, 186 females, 1 gender not reported) completed the survey and were included in the study. Respondents' ages ranged between 18 and 58 years old ($M = 23.18$, $SD = 4.91$). Respondents were completing or had completed a consecutive teacher preparation program ($n = 81$) or were completing or had completed a concurrent teacher preparation program ($n = 131$).

Demographic data were collected to identify the details of each respondent's program route and the stage of completion of their teacher preparation. Twenty-one respondents had previously graduated.

Measures

Demographics: Several types of demographic data were collected in this survey to support comparisons across groups. Data about age, gender (0 = male, 1 = female), current status in the education program (i.e., year of concurrent program, graduated from consecutive or concurrent), were collected for descriptive information and to investigate relationships between demographics and dependent variables.

Knowledge and Confidence: A total of four questions developed by the researchers was used to assess knowledge and confidence in the classroom which participants attributed to having learned about via the classroom management models presented to them in their teacher preparation programs. Each of the four questions focused on pre-service teachers' perceptions of how knowledgeable and confident they felt about intervening when they might be required to use either verbal or physical responses to disruptions in their classrooms. Prompts included opportunities to indicate knowledge and confidence in dealing with: intervening effectively in a verbal confrontation involving students; intervening effectively in a physical confrontation involving students; identifying situations that require the teacher to use force; and, using an appropriate level of force when force is deemed necessary.

Questions were responded to on a 5 point scale from 0 = *definitely not* to 4 = *definitely*. The four questions were summed to obtain an overall total score that could range between 0 and 20; higher scores indicated the perception that more knowledge and confidence was gained from exposure to the topic during the teacher preparation program. Internal consistency was calculated for the following four items related to the question "How well do you think you are prepared to...?". Cronbach's alpha was used to calculate internal consistency for the four prompts: 'intervene effectively in a physical confrontation involving students', 'intervene effectively in a verbal confrontation involving students', 'identify situations that require you to use force', and 'use an appropriate level of force when force is deemed necessary'. The questions demonstrated high consistency ($\alpha = .91$).

Procedure

An invitation to participate in a comprehensive study of pre-service teachers' confidence and knowledge was posted on an existing Facebook group designed to promote professional support amongst teacher candidates. A brief description of the purpose of the study was provided. This included a link to the participant information letter. Those who were interested followed the link to the information sheet which provided all information necessary for informed consent.

Potential participants could agree to continue or could exit the program, after reading the introductory letter. Completion of the questionnaire indicated each respondent's agreement to participate in the study. One reminder of the opportunity to participate in the survey research was posted on the Facebook site one month after it was first advertised. Data collection was completed over a two month period. Completion of the entire questionnaire required approximately 15 minutes. Only those questions related to perceptions of the value of learning as a skill set to develop classroom management processes were analysed for this subcomponent of the study.

Results

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine differences in responses to the four prompts for the entire group of participants. The four focal questions were each compared to one another to determine whether significant differences existed. When the whole group of 212 respondents was considered as a unit, there was a significant difference among responses to the four questions. The difference in responses to 'intervene effectively in a physical confrontation involving students' ($M=2.49$, $SD=.96$) and 'intervene effectively in a verbal confrontation involving students' ($M=2.73$, $SD=.88$), $t(179)=-4.362$, $p=.000$ was significant. Generally, respondents reported more confidence in their preparedness to deal with classroom management situations verbally than they felt prepared to deal with situations physically should circumstances warrant this level of intervention. Further, the correlation between these two measures was equal to $r=.700$, $p=.000$, $n=180$. Participants who felt more comfortable intervening physically also tended to feel more comfortable intervening verbally.

When we examined individual subsets within the group, regardless of the program of teacher preparation they had pursued, the following trends were evident:

- In this sample, there were no significant differences in confidence to address classroom management either verbally or physically between male and female respondents. That is, both genders appear to be equally confident in this professional area.

- In this sample, there was no significant difference in the respondents' confidence to intervene with classroom management strategies both verbally or physically across age groups; while older people in the response group reported more confidence to intervene verbally and physically as required, the correlation between age and confidence is weak; although a general trend is evident, inconsistencies in the data make the correlation weak.
- There was no difference across genders or ages of respondents when their confidence to use appropriate levels of force in discipline situations was considered.

In trying to make sense of the data, we considered these results in reference to another question on the survey. Question 17 (2) of the survey addressed the duty and standards of care required of teachers in the jurisdiction. In this jurisdiction, the standards of care have several purposes, including: to inspire a shared vision for the teaching profession; to identify the values, knowledge and skills that are distinctive to the teaching profession; to guide the professional judgment and actions of the teaching profession; and to promote a common language that fosters an understanding of what it means to be a member of the teaching profession. Five standards are identified to provide guidance for the profession. These standards include: commitment to students and student learning; professional knowledge; professional practice; leadership in learning communities; and ongoing professional learning. It seemed clear that making the bridge between knowledge and confidence are implicit in the standards "professional knowledge" and "professional practice". However, when we analyzed responses to the duty and standards of care section of the survey and consider the data in relation to the classroom management data, it became evident that across all respondents in this survey, regardless of program, self-reports of knowledge of what the teacher *should do* are stronger than self-reports of confidence *to do it* when the situation arises. That is, even when participants reported that they knew what to do in a situation involving discipline in the classroom (i.e., when they have enough knowledge), they are not confident to do what they know is needed. Participants were consistently more knowledgeable about what their duty was and the standards required of them than they were with identifying situations where they should intervene physically in a discipline situation.

Several differences and correlations were examined among the four prompts for the entire group to determine connections among the four concepts (Table 1). For the entire group, there was a significant difference between responses to 'intervene effectively in a physical confrontation involving students' ($M=2.49$, $SD=.96$) and 'identify situations that require you to use force' ($M=2.36$, $SD=1.06$), $t(179)=2.499$, $p=.013$. Further, the correlation between these two measures was equal to $r=.730$, $p=.000$, $n=180$. Other significant differences among the entire group of respondents were found. For the entire group, there was a significant difference between responses to 'intervene effectively in a verbal confrontation involving students' ($M=2.73$, $SD=.88$) and 'identify situations that require you to use force' ($M=2.36$, $SD=1.06$), $t(179)=6.149$, $p=.000$. Further, the correlation between these two measures was equal to $r=.662$, $p=.000$, $n=180$. That is, participants felt more confident to intervene verbally rather than physically if the situation in their classrooms required such intervention.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Responses to Four Questions (for All Participants)

Question	M	SD
'intervene effectively in a physical confrontation involving students'	2.49	.96
'intervene effectively in a verbal confrontation involving students'	2.73	.88
'identify situations that require you to use force'	2.36	1.06
'use an appropriate level of force when force is deemed necessary'	2.40	1.02

For the entire group, there was a significant difference between responses to 'intervene effectively in a verbal confrontation involving students' ($M=2.73$, $SD=.88$) and 'use an appropriate level of force when force is deemed necessary' ($M=2.40$, $SD=1.02$), $t(179)=5.089$, $p=.000$. Further, the correlation between these two measures was equal to $r=.597$, $p=.000$, $n=180$. The participants felt confident to intervene verbally in a confrontation with students, but less confident to use an appropriate level of force even if it was deemed necessary.

Some comparisons found no significant differences in the entire respondent group. For the entire group, there was no significant difference between responses to 'intervene effectively in a physical confrontation involving students' ($M=2.49$, $SD=.96$) and 'use an appropriate level of force when force is deemed necessary' ($M=2.40$, $SD=1.02$), $t(179)=1.621$, $p=.107$. Further, the correlation between these two measures was equal to $r=.691$, $p=.000$, $n=180$. Also, for the entire group, there was no significant difference between

responses to 'identify situations that require you to use force' ($M=2.36$, $SD=1.06$) and 'use an appropriate level of force when force is deemed necessary' ($M=2.40$, $SD=1.02$), $t(179)=-1.089$, $p=.278$. Further, the correlation between these two measures was equal to $r=.862$, $p=.000$, $n=180$.

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare participants from the consecutive and concurrent education programs on their average responses to each of the four survey questions (Table 2). There was a significant difference between consecutive ($M=2.79$, $SD=.97$) and concurrent ($M=2.30$, $SD=.91$) on 'intervene effectively in a physical confrontation involving students', $t(178)=3.417$, $p=.001$. There was a significant difference between consecutive participants ($M=2.66$, $SD=1.03$) and concurrent participants ($M=2.16$, $SD=1.03$) on 'identify situations that require you to use force', $t(178)=3.226$, $p=.001$. There was a significant difference between consecutive participants ($M=2.69$, $SD=1.02$) and concurrent participants ($M=2.21$, $SD=.98$) on 'use an appropriate level of force when force is deemed necessary', $t(178)=3.148$, $p=.002$. According to the results of each of these comparisons, the consecutive program participants reported greater confidence than the concurrent program participants, although neither group is overly confident on the measures that were examined. Additionally, there was no significant difference between consecutive participants ($M=2.89$, $SD=.95$) and concurrent participants ($M=2.62$, $SD=.83$) on 'intervene effectively in a verbal confrontation involving students', $t(178)=1.972$, $p=.050$.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Consecutive and Concurrent Education Program Participants' Responses to Four Questions

Question	Consecutive		Concurrent	
	M	SD	M	SD
'intervene effectively in a physical confrontation involving students'	2.79	.97	2.30	.91
'intervene effectively in a verbal confrontation involving students'	2.89	.95	2.62	.83
'identify situations that require you to use force'	2.66	1.03	2.16	1.03
'use an appropriate level of force when force is deemed necessary'	2.69	1.02	2.21	.98

Discussion

The results of this study are interesting because they supply an idea of trends among groups of teacher preparation candidates that identify their perceptions of knowledge and confidence about classroom discipline. Since classroom discipline is such a major role for teachers, this area of investigation requires ongoing study among professionals and researchers. Currently much of the literature about classroom discipline focuses on the sources of classroom disruptions and on models for approaching discipline in the classroom through both preventative and reactive approaches. The preventative approaches that are reported in the literature consistently make connections between good classroom management and good teaching. That is, they propose that if good teaching is a constant condition in the classroom, many or all of the potential discipline problems may be averted.

However, it is clear from our current research that teacher candidates do not feel overly confident to deal with classroom management situations in their classrooms after their teacher education programs are complete. When confidence to deal with classroom situations is considered, all students feel more confident to address situations that they perceive can be solved through verbal intervention than they do with addressing situations that may require physical intervention. The difference between the concurrent and consecutive teacher candidates' responses also seem to indicate that increased amounts of practicum time during the preparation program do not result in increased knowledge and confidence in dealing with either verbal or physical interventions in the case of classroom misbehaviours. This is an important finding since it is generally assumed that such skills and confidence are a function of experience. It may be that associate teachers intervene in pre-service situations where severe misbehavior occurs, reducing the likelihood of teacher candidates getting any first hand experience addressing such issues.

This may provide some direction to program planners in the jurisdiction as program review is undertaken. It may be that teacher candidates get further learning opportunities to develop management skills in courses that are specifically designed to address classroom management (i.e., as experienced by the consecutive participants in this study) than they do in the case of courses that focus on classroom management as an

embedded module in a more general course (i.e., as experienced by the concurrent participants in this study).

It is evident from our research that all teacher candidates need more exposure to identifying classroom situations that require physical intervention and with identifying the appropriate level of force that may be required if force is deemed necessary. There is little doubt that fear of the outcomes of physical interventions (e.g., fear of harming the student or themselves, fear of parental reaction, fear of job loss or professional discipline) is an issue requiring further investigation. It is an untenable situation for teachers if they see the need to intervene physically in the best interests of all students but fear the consequences of acting in response to this need. If teacher candidates were better prepared in this area by learning how to respond, how to communicate about their choice of response, and how to understand the support mechanisms in their jurisdiction, including the culture of the school regarding physical interventions, this may translate into stronger feelings of preparedness to intervene appropriately.

This study may also have highlighted an appropriate professional reticence to be too hasty to respond to a discipline situation with physical intervention before exhausting all avenues of verbal intervention. No doubt further classroom experiences with handling discipline situations would benefit all teacher candidates regardless of their program route. This may highlight an opportunity to design targeted practicum experiences during pre-service programs to ensure that students are exposed to opportunities to manage a classroom with appropriate modeling from associate teachers readily available if the situation escalates beyond the comfort level of the teacher candidate.

This study represented a preliminary comparison of perceived competencies resulting from two substantially different teacher preparation program routes on three campuses of a small northern university. The sample size (212) was respectable, but results should be interpreted with caution. Although there was a significant difference between the groups of students on some measures and correlations examined in this study, it must be noted that neither group of students felt overly confident in dealing with behaviour incidents in their classrooms, whether verbal or physical intervention was considered necessary. However, it is notable that all participants in this study reported feeling more confident to intervene verbally than physically, even when they felt confident that they could identify situations that required physical intervention. While similar trends might also be found among experienced classroom teachers, this finding could point to the need to provide at least introductory training in physical intervention in violent classroom situations for new teachers.

Limitations

As our purpose was to compare two groups of students in the self-reported knowledge and confidence on specific self-perceptions, our data is limited to what participants felt but does not explore why they reported these feelings. It may be valuable to repeat this study with a mixed methods approach to investigate what teacher candidates report as self-perceptions of knowledge and confidence related to classroom management and to relate their perceptions to their explanations of why they reported as they did. This approach would help us to determine the relative value of course instruction versus on-the-job experience in developing complex classroom management skills in new teachers. It might also be of value to accompany another study with a personality inventory to determine if certain personality types report more confidence to deal with escalations of problematic classroom situations.

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